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Sen. Hardiman hears audit of Michigan's Foster Care Program

LANSING – A hearing was held today in light of a newly released state audit that criticized the Michigan Department of Human Services for its failure to properly oversee its foster-care system, Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, listened to the testimony given and believes that the department and the Legislature are headed toward progress.

Auditor General Thomas McTavish issued a harshly critical report that revealed the Children's Foster Care Program had not conducted adequate criminal background checks on those working in the system between Oct. 1, 2000 and May 31, 2004. The report showed that the department had not monitored contractors to ensure they were delivering the services for which they were paid.

Hardiman asked the department explain its performance in light of the Auditor General's report. Marianne Udow, director of the Department of Human Services, came to speak on behalf of the department. She did not challenge the Auditor General's recommendations.

Currently, there are 19,500 children in foster care in Michigan. Hardiman said each individual child is deserving of the best possible care DHS can provide.

"Pure and simple, the findings of this audit are unacceptable," Hardiman said. "While the results of the audit are disturbing, it is important to acknowledge and support the many quality foster care families across the state."

One highlighted issue is the lack of criminal background checks.

"A background check is crucial and necessary measurement in monitoring the foster care providers," Hardiman said. Senator Hardiman has sponsored and presided over the day care background bills. He has requested the drafting of legislation to mandate background checks for foster care situations.

"Foster care children often come out of troubled and stressful situations. We must ensure that their placement in foster care does not expose them to dangerous or unhealthy settings," Hardiman said.

Hardiman pledged continued oversight of the troubled program.

Hardiman chairs the Senate Families and Human Services Committee and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee that oversees the budget for the Department of Human Services.

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Editor's note: Comments from Sen. Hardiman may be downloaded from the Michigan Senate Republican Majority audiowire at:
<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/audiowire/hardiman/index.htm>.